

# Social Relationships Rock! How Parents, Coaches, and Peers Can Optimize Girls' Psychological Development Through Sport and Physical Activity

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In an interview prior to the 2016 Olympics, soccer player Alex Morgan, gold-medalist in the 2012 London Olympics and member of the 2015 World Cup champions, remarked, “I think organized sports are a huge building block for young girls ... It helps with confidence, it helps with friendships, and I feel like you learn a lot faster how to play a certain role on a team ... and that carries over to life skills that are necessary when you have a job” (McCarvel, 2016). Alex Morgan’s remarks reflect the long-held belief that sport participation holds the potential to develop and enhance positive psychological and behavioral outcomes, such as self-esteem, peer relationships, teamwork, and skills that generalize from the field to many life domains (Wiggins, 2013). The operating term is *potential*, because positive outcomes are not an automatic consequence of participating in sport. Indeed, the media portrays examples of negative coaching, overbearing parents, and win-at-all-costs attitudes, which indicates that the opposite effect is also possible.

What makes the difference between positive and negative psychosocial outcomes for girls in organized sport and physical activity? Quality of interactions and relationships with parents, coaches, and teammates—whom young girls look up to as models, rely upon for support, and seek out for performance feedback, social reinforcement, and skill instruction—hold the key to whether sport’s potential to optimize positive outcomes is realized (Weiss, Kipp, & Bolter, 2012). The importance of social relationships for positive psychological development is highlighted in every developmental theory, and studies abound providing robust findings of the mechanisms by which parents, coaches, and peers influence young female athletes’ self-perceptions (e.g., self-esteem), emotions (e.g., enjoyment), and motivational orientations and behaviors (e.g., intrinsic motivation, continued participation) in sport and physical activity. Thus, to achieve the potential for positive outcomes to occur as a result of sport participation, we must pay careful attention to what parents, coaches, and peers *say* and *do* in physical activity contexts and how girls are likely to interpret and respond to these verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

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**Quality relationships hold the key to whether sport’s potential to optimize positive outcomes is realized**

We systematically explore the research evidence on how significant adults and peers influence young female participants, with an emphasis on *how* positive outcomes are shaped. We follow this review of literature by translating research to evidence-based best practices for parents, coaches, and program leaders for enhancing girls' positive experiences and developmental outcomes in sport and physical activity. We focus on studies conducted in structured (school and out-of-school-time sport) and unstructured physical activity (e.g., friends doing activities together that do not have coaches or scheduled practices). These contexts are ones in which studies predominate on social influence and psychological development, and which lend themselves to practical implications for those who work with female participants.

## Parental Influence on Girls' Psychological Outcomes

Parents are first and foremost to socialize girls into sport and physical activity, and they continue to be influential throughout adolescence (Horn & Horn, 2007). They are instrumental in registering daughters for teams, transporting to practices and competitions, and offering feedback for skill learning and performance. Parents influence girls' perceptions of competence, enjoyment, and motivation by expressing beliefs about and expectations of their child's involvement in sport as well as by modeling attitudes and behaviors that convey the value they place on being physically active. We organize our review of research on parental influence of girls' psychological outcomes using Fredricks and Eccles' (2005) categories of parents as *providers of experience* (e.g., enabling opportunities), as *interpreters of experience* (e.g., expressing confidence in child's ability), and as *role models* (e.g., being physically active). Most studies included multiple forms of parental attitudes and behaviors as contributors to daughters' self-beliefs and participation in sport and physical activity.

### PARENTS AS PROVIDERS OF EXPERIENCE

Surveys with and interviews of youth (e.g., Bhalla & Weiss, 2010; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005) and collegiate players and coaches (Dixon, Warner, & Bruening, 2008; Weiss & Barber, 1995) implicate parents as *providing opportunities* for daughters to enroll in and reap the benefits of sport participation. Examples of providing experiences include paying for lessons, transporting to practices, attending games, giving performance feedback, and offering encouragement and emotional support. Consistent findings reveal that girls who report greater parental involvement, encouragement, and social support score higher on perceived physical competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation, and are more likely to continue participating, than girls who rate their parents lower in these behaviors (Weiss, Kipp, & Bolter, 2012).

The significance of parental social support is also seen in studies examining physical activity behavior (Davison, Cutting, & Birch, 2003; Davison, Downs, & Birch, 2006; Silva, Lott, Mota, & Welk, 2014). Mothers reported providing higher levels of logistical support for their 9-year-old daughters than did fathers, which included enrolling them in sports and going to sporting events together (Davison et al., 2003). Higher levels of mothers' logistical support were associated with higher levels of girls' physical activity involvement. Silva et al. found that adolescent females who perceived greater social support by parents reported higher enjoyment, self-efficacy, and moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) than girls who reported lower levels of parental social support. This finding, coupled with girls being significantly lower in MVPA than their male peers, accentuates the salience of parental involvement in and encouragement of their daughters' physical activity pursuits.

The other end of parental social support is pressure placed on children to participate and perform in sport. Female athletes who perceive greater pressure by or obligation to parents to succeed in sport report lower enjoyment, higher anxiety, and lower intrinsic motivation and commitment (e.g., Bois, Lalanne, & Delforge, 2009; O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2011; Weiss & Weiss, 2007). Bois et al. found that adolescent female tennis players reported greater pressure from parents than did male peers, and greater perceived pressure was related to higher levels of performance anxiety. W.M. Weiss and Weiss found that greater perceived parental pressure was associated with lower desire and resolve to continue participation among 8- to 14-year-old gymnasts. Thus, maximizing parental social support and minimizing parental pressure is critical for young female participants.

## **PARENTS AS INTERPRETERS OF EXPERIENCE**

In a classic study, Eccles and Harold (1991) found marked gender differences, favoring males, among youth on perceptions of sport ability, importance placed on doing well in sports, enjoyment of playing sports, and free time spent in sport activities. By contrast, girls reported reading and writing as more important and enjoyable and spent more time doing these activities than boys. These differential findings were attributed to gender stereotyping, meaning parents' beliefs and behaviors about appropriateness of gender roles are internalized by children and manifested in ratings of athletic ability, enjoyment, and time spent in male- (sport) and female-typed (language arts) activities. These findings accentuate how children's perceptions of parents' gender beliefs can contribute to their own beliefs and behaviors in achievement domains.

Now, over two decades later, with the impact of Title IX resulting in more opportunities for girls' participation in sports, what does the literature reveal about parents' gendered beliefs and children's experiences in sport? Some studies show that parents hold gender-

typed beliefs by providing greater encouragement, opportunities, and support for their sons than for their daughters in sport (e.g., Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Other studies show no gender differences in perceptions of parental beliefs about, involvement in, and support for girls' sport participation (e.g., Bois, Sarrazin, Brustad, Trouilloud, & Cury, 2002, 2005; Davison, 2004). Horn and Horn (2007) indicate that parents who are gender-schematic use gender as an attribute for interpreting experiences, such as appropriateness of certain sports for girls and boys, whereas individuals who are gender-aschematic do not use gender as a factor in determining sport appropriateness. Thus, gender beliefs about the potential for girls and boys to do well in sport connotes one way in which parents interpret experiences for their daughters.

A strong finding for parents as interpreters of experience points to beliefs about their child's competence in and the value they place on being successful in sport (e.g., Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Bois, Sarrazin, Brustad, Chanal, & Trouilloud, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Bois et al. (2002) found that mothers' ability beliefs for 8- to 12-year-old daughters predicted the child's perceived physical competence one year later, independent of initial perceived competence and physical performance. Bhalla and Weiss (2010) interviewed Anglo- and East Indian adolescent female athletes about parental influences on sport involvement. Both groups gave examples of how parents' positive beliefs about their participation translated to encouraging daughters to be active, providing feedback about performance, and expressing pride in accomplishments. These beliefs and behaviors influenced girls' success expectations, value toward sport, and participation behaviors.

Parents' goal orientations and the motivational climate they create for their children delineate how they define success in sport, which affects girls' beliefs and behaviors (Horn & Horn, 2007). Parents who are high in task goal orientation define success in self-referenced terms—as demonstrating effort and mastering and improving skills. This orientation is associated with creating a climate that emphasizes learning, effort, and improvement. By contrast, parents who are high in ego goal orientation define success in norm-referenced terms—as comparing favorably to peers and performance outcome. This orientation is associated with creating a climate that recognizes the best performers and winning. Female participants' perceptions of parents' goal orientations and motivational climate are strongly related to their own goal orientations and psychosocial outcomes (Kimiecik & Horn, 1998; Kimiecik, Horn, & Shurin, 1996; O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2014). O'Rourke et al. found that 9- to 14-year-old swimmers who perceived the parent climate as highly task-involving reported higher self-esteem and intrinsic motivation and lower performance anxiety at season's end, whereas those reporting the parent climate as more ego-involving showed the opposite outcomes.

## PARENTS AS ROLE MODELS

*Modeling* refers to change in attitudes and behaviors as a result of observing others, and *models* are individuals whose verbal and nonverbal behaviors serve as cues for observers' responses (McCullagh & Weiss, 2002). This definition of observational learning means that girls' physical activity beliefs and behaviors are influenced not only by what they *see* their parents doing but also by what they *hear* and interpret from verbal and nonverbal expression. Girls might not have the opportunity to directly observe parents exercise at the gym, but they may hear parents express positive exercise feelings at the dinner table. In addition, parents may spend time playing with their child, may have participated as high school athletes, or may coach their child's team. These are also consistent with parents as role models. Early research simply examined whether parent and child physical activity levels were correlated with each other and found mixed support for modeling—but this was a narrow approach for determining whether parents are role models for their daughters.

Using an inclusive definition of modeling, findings show that girls' perceptions that mothers and fathers model positive attitudes and behaviors are strongly related to their perceived athletic competence, enjoyment of sport, intrinsic motivation, and continued involvement (Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Bhalla & Weiss, 2010; Dixon et al., 2008; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Babkes and Weiss found that 9- to 11-year-old female soccer players who rated mothers and fathers as positive role models reported higher ability perceptions, enjoyment, and preference for optimally challenging activities than players reporting lower parent modeling. Dixon et al. conducted a retrospective study in which collegiate women coaches recalled parental socialization into sport. They indicated that mothers *and* fathers were positive role models based on expressed support for their daughter's sport participation and their experiences as high school and collegiate athletes. Respondents reported that fathers coached their teams while mothers were logistical and emotional supporters. Research is needed to study the impact of mother-coaches as models for their daughter-athletes.

Parents as role models have also been studied for girls' unstructured physical activity (Bois, Sarrazin, Brustad, Trouilloud, & Cury, 2005; Davison & Jago, 2009; Sabiston & Crocker, 2008; Schoeppe, Liersch, Robl, Krauth, & Walter, 2016). Youths' perceptions that mothers and fathers express positive emotions about and engage in frequent physical activity are strongly associated with their perceived competence in, value toward, and level of physical activity. Interestingly, Bois et al. found that mothers', but not fathers', modeling of physical activity behavior was significantly related to 9- to 11-year-old girls' and boys' physical activity levels. Sabiston and Crocker found that female adolescents who rated parents as role models (combined with value toward physical activity and emotional support)

reported higher perceived competence, value toward physical activity and physical activity levels. Thus, parent modeling is an important way to support girls' positive experiences in physical activity and sport.

## **Coaches' Influence on Girls' Psychological Outcomes**

Coaches and physical activity instructors play an important role in fostering positive psychological, social, and physical outcomes for girls (Horn, 2008; Weiss et al., 2012). We describe five important types of coach or instructor influence that have been consistently related to girls' self-perceptions, enjoyment, motivation, and persistence in sport and physical activity: feedback patterns, motivational climate, interpersonal style, transformational leadership, and social support.

### **FEEDBACK PATTERNS**

Coaches' quality of feedback and reinforcement is consistently tied to athletes' experiences in sport and physical activity. Positive and performance-contingent reinforcement, encouragement, and technical instruction can maximize girls' psychosocial and behavioral benefits from sport participation, such as perceived competence, self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, and persistence (Black & Weiss, 1992; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006; Horn, 1985; Weiss, Amorose, & Wilko, 2009). Coatsworth and Conroy trained youth swimming coaches to engage in frequent reinforcement and instructional behaviors and to eliminate punishment for mistakes. Girls in the intervention group who started the season with lower self-esteem made the largest gains in self-esteem over the swim season. Therefore, coaches' use of feedback and reinforcement can set the stage for girls to gain psychological benefits in sport, especially for those who need it the most.

The quantity and quality of coaches' feedback and reinforcement are influenced by their expectations of girls' ability levels (Horn, Lox, & Labrador, 2015). Although there are few physiological differences between boys and girls before puberty, some coaches and instructors hold stereotyped beliefs that girls are less physically able than boys; subsequently, less instructional feedback is given and positive reinforcement may be given inappropriately, such as praise for easy tasks or mediocre performances due to lower performance expectations for girls. Praise that is not genuine or aligned with performance may signal to girls that they are lower in ability, and confidence and motivation can be negatively affected. In a classic study showing this effect with adolescent softball players, Horn (1985) found that greater coach reinforcement after desirable performances was associated with decreased perceived competence, whereas greater constructive criticism following errors was associated

with gains in perceived competence. These results imply that reinforcement needs to be contingent to performance in order to optimize psychological responses. Contingent praise for mastery attempts coupled with instruction is important for girls of all ages because, over time, inadequate instruction and reinforcement may exacerbate post-pubertal gender differences in physical capabilities.

### **MOTIVATIONAL CLIMATE**

The motivational climate that a coach creates is informed by how they define success, how they structure practices, and how they evaluate performances (Ames, 1992; Harwood, Keegan, Smith, & Raine, 2015). In a mastery climate, the coach emphasizes effort, improvement, and learning as keys to success. In a performance climate, favorable social comparison and performance outcome (i.e., winning, placement) are emphasized. Greater perceptions of a mastery climate and lower perceptions of a performance climate are associated with higher perceived competence, positive emotions, autonomy, relatedness (feelings of connection with coaches and teammates), self-determined motivation, persistence, and skill learning (Kipp & Amorose, 2008; Kipp & Weiss, 2013, 2015; Theeboom, De Knop, & Weiss, 1995; Weiss et al., 2009). Kipp and Amorose found that when coaches were perceived to place greater emphasis on effort and improvement, recognize each athlete's unique role on the team, and engage in less punishment for mistakes, female adolescent athletes reported higher competence, autonomy, relatedness, and self-determined motivation. Weiss et al. found that female adolescent athletes reported greater enjoyment, perceived competence, and intrinsic motivation when they reported coaches placed greater emphasis on a mastery climate and less emphasis on a performance climate. Thus, coaches who use self-referenced, rather than norm-referenced, criteria to define success create an environment optimizing girls' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

### **INTERPERSONAL LEADERSHIP STYLES**

Interpersonal leadership styles refer to autonomy-supportive and controlling coach behaviors. Autonomy-support is demonstrated when coaches allow for athletes' choice and input, provide a rationale for activities, and acknowledge athletes' thoughts and ideas. Controlling coach behaviors include using rewards or punishment to control athletes' actions, giving overly critical feedback as a motivational strategy, and using their power to dictate athletes' behaviors both in and out of the sport setting (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

Autonomy-supportive coaching behaviors are associated with many psychological, social, and behavioral benefits for female participants, including greater perceived competence, autonomy, relatedness, self-determined motivation, self-esteem, positive emotions, and



persistence, and lower negative emotions and burnout. By contrast, controlling coach behaviors are linked with lower perceived autonomy and relatedness and higher extrinsic motivation and dropout from sport (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2015; Kipp & Weiss, 2013, 2015; Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Brière, 2001; Queded & Duda, 2010, 2011; Reynolds & McDonough, 2015). Reynolds and McDonough found that greater perceptions of autonomy-support by the coach were associated with higher perceived competence, autonomy, relatedness, and self-determined motivation among female adolescent soccer players. Kipp and Weiss (2013) found that female gymnasts' perceptions that coaches implemented a mastery climate and engaged in autonomy-supportive behaviors were associated with a higher sense of autonomy, relatedness, and positive emotions, whereas higher levels of coach controlling behaviors were associated with lower perceived autonomy. Post-pubertal girls reported lower gymnastics ability, self-esteem, and positive emotions than pre-pubertal girls. At a follow-up assessment seven months later, Kipp and Weiss (2015) found that higher levels of coach autonomy-supportive behaviors and use of a mastery climate predicted higher perceived competence and self-esteem and fewer symptoms of disordered eating. In sum, providing opportunities for choice and input, minimizing the use of external control, and emphasizing skill mastery and improvement are important ways coaches can promote psychosocial outcomes among female athletes and help counter the risk of lower well-being for post-pubertal girls.

Evaluation research of two physical activity-based positive youth development programs—*The First Tee* and *Girls on the Run*—highlight the positive impact of coach autonomy-supportive behaviors *and* mastery motivational climate on life skills learning and developmental outcomes among children and adolescents (Weiss, 2017, 2018; Weiss, Bolter, & Kipp, 2016; Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter, & Price, 2013). In these longitudinal studies, participants in *The First Tee* and *Girls on the Run* favorably compared to a control group on self-perceptions, interpersonal skills, and life skills learning and transfer, including emotion management, resolving conflict, helping others, and making informed decisions. Lasting impact on life skills learning was seen months after season's end for *Girls on the Run* and over a 3-year period of assessment for *The First Tee*. These positive outcomes were directly aligned with the intentional life skills curriculum delivered by coaches trained to use a mastery-oriented and autonomy-supportive interpersonal style to bring about physical and life skill learning and positive psychological and social development.



## **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS**

Transformational leadership in sport refers to coaches who are role models and who inspire their athletes to exert maximum effort and reach their performance potential. Transformational leadership (Bass, 1998) is defined by four leader behaviors: (a) inspirational motivation (setting high achievement standards and exhibiting confidence in attaining them), (b) idealized influence (modeling desirable attitudes and behaviors), (c) intellectual stimulation (facilitating problem-solving and creativity among teammates), and (d) individualized consideration (recognizing the needs and interests of each team member). Athlete perceptions of more frequent transformational coach behaviors are associated with higher perceived competence, autonomy, relatedness, sport enjoyment, and positive emotions among adolescent athletes (Price & Weiss, 2013; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). Price and Weiss found that perceptions of greater coach transformational behaviors were associated with greater perceived competence, enjoyment, task cohesion, and team confidence among adolescent female soccer players. Thus, girls gain psychological and social benefits when coaches set high standards, model desirable qualities, facilitate problem-solving, and consider athletes' interests.

## **SOCIAL SUPPORT**

Socially supportive coaches and instructors provide encouragement and display care and respect toward youth. Perceptions of social support are positively associated with girls' physical and global self-worth, physical fitness, and physical activity levels (e.g., Bruening, Dover, & Clark, 2009; Dishman, Dunn, Sallis, Vandenberg, & Pratt, 2010; Dishman, Saunders, Motl, Dowda, & Pate, 2009). Bruening and colleagues conducted a 12-week physical activity program for pre-adolescent girls of color with college student-athletes as mentors and instructors. Mentors and participants engaged in one-on-one interactions to discuss life skills (e.g., conflict resolution, dealing with peer pressure) and participate in physical activity together; topics and activities were cooperatively chosen. Interviews revealed that girls improved in physical activity and self-worth over the course of the intervention. In a physical activity intervention with female adolescents, Dishman et al. (2009) found that higher levels of perceived social support by instructors helped to mitigate girls' decline in physical activity. Thus, instructors can optimize physical activity and positive self-perceptions by providing opportunities for social support.

## Peer Influence on Girls' Psychological Outcomes

While parents are the first to socialize daughters into sport, and coaches are important for creating a mastery-oriented and autonomy-supportive climate, one's peers such as classmates, teammates, and close friends occupy a central role in girls' sport and physical activity experiences throughout childhood and adolescence. A consistent finding is that girls are motivated to initiate, continue, and maintain participation in sport and physical activity for social reasons—to be with friends, make new friends, feel part of a group or team, and attain acceptance and approval from peers (Weiss, 2013). Thus, understanding the processes by which peers influence each other's self-perceptions, emotional responses, and motivational outcomes in sport and physical activity is important for optimizing positive and minimizing negative experiences. We organize the review of research around the three major topics in which peers have been studied: peer group acceptance, friendship, and peer leadership.

### PEER GROUP ACCEPTANCE

Peer group acceptance refers to the degree to which a child is liked by his or her broader peer group (e.g., teammates), whereas friendship refers to a close, dyadic relationship (e.g., best friends). Youth sport participants who feel they are accepted and liked by teammates, or who define being successful as favorable regard by peers, report higher ability beliefs, enjoyment, self-determined motivation, and commitment (Garn, 2016; Smith, Ullrich-French, Walker, & Hurley, 2006; Stuntz & Weiss, 2009; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006, 2009). Garn found that higher perceptions of teammate acceptance among female adolescent volleyball players were associated with greater enjoyment, effort, and desire and resolve to keep playing. Similar outcomes of feeling accepted by and connected to peer groups emerge in studies for unstructured activity, with the added beneficial outcome of greater physical activity levels (Jago et al., 2009, 2011; Smith, 1999; Spink, Wilson, & Ulvick, 2012).

Peer conflict in sport is an understudied but important area for understanding psychological and behavioral consequences. In an interview study with female adolescent athletes, Partridge and Knapp (2016) found that causes of teammate conflict included jealousy, personality characteristics, parental interference, and cliques. Manifestations of this conflict emerged in the forms of relational aggression (e.g., gossiping, negative remarks on social media), sport-specific victimization (e.g., not passing the ball to a teammate, denying opportunities), and direct victimization in team sports (e.g., confronting a teammate verbally or physically). Outcomes of peer conflict included lower team cohesion and performance as a result of higher competitive anxiety and other negative emotions (e.g., frustration, anger). Opportunity for teammate conflict is likely in sport contexts—coaches are an important source of mitigating conflicts through their interpersonal style and provision of team-building opportunities.

## FRIENDSHIP

Close friends, such as teammates or non-sport “besties”, can be sources of support for girls in sport and physical activity (Weiss & Stuntz, 2004). Support can include behaviors such as encouragement, modeling, loyalty, and intimate disclosure. Weiss and colleagues conducted a series of studies to determine how youth define qualities of a best friend in sport (Weiss, Smith, & Theeboom, 1996), to develop a survey of friendship quality (Weiss & Smith, 1999), and to assess the relationship between friendship dimensions and psychosocial outcomes (Weiss & Smith, 2002). Interview responses revealed 12 positive friendship qualities (e.g., self-esteem enhancement, emotional support) and 4 negative qualities (e.g., conflict, betrayal). The Sport Friendship Quality Scale produced six categories (companionship/pleasant play, self-esteem enhancement and supportiveness, loyalty and intimacy, things in common, conflict resolution, and conflict). Subsequent studies revealed strong associations between positive friendship qualities and favorable self-perceptions, affective responses, self-determined motivation, and sport commitment, with the reverse association for friendship conflict (Kipp & Weiss, 2013; Smith, 1999; Smith et al., 2006; Weiss & Smith, 2002).

Similar findings show that friend support, encouragement, and modeling contribute to physical activity levels (Davison & Jago, 2009; Jago et al., 2009, 2011; Sabiston & Crocker, 2008; Schofield, Mummery, Schofield, & Hopkins, 2007). Schofield et al. assessed adolescent girls’ physical activity with that of three closest friends, including reciprocated and non-reciprocated friends. Girls with a larger number of active friends were more likely to reach the criterion of 10,000 steps, and a significant relationship emerged for a girl’s physical activity level with that of a reciprocated friend.

Several studies simultaneously examined the influence of friendship and peer group acceptance on adolescents’ psychosocial and behavioral outcomes (Smith et al., 2006; Stuntz & Weiss, 2003, 2009; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006, 2009). Stuntz and Weiss (2009) found that adolescent sport participants who were higher in friendship and peer acceptance goal orientations (i.e., feeling successful when developing a close, mutual friendship and being liked by teammates) reported greater perceived competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation than those scoring lower in peer orientations. Ullrich-French and Smith found that 10- to 14-year-old soccer players who reported higher friendship quality and peer acceptance scored higher in perceived physical competence and intrinsic motivation and were more likely to return to soccer one year later.

## **PEER LEADERSHIP**

Sport offers the potential for girls to learn and demonstrate leadership behaviors. Studies reveal that teammates who are considered leaders by their peers (not only team captains but those perceived as leaders by example) are characterized by instrumental (goal-oriented) and expressive (social-oriented) behaviors. In addition, they are higher in peer group acceptance and positive friendship quality (Glenn & Horn, 1993; Moran & Weiss, 2006; Price & Weiss, 2011, 2013). Based on links among leadership and peer constructs, Moran and Weiss suggested that social competence is the thread of similarity that binds these characteristics and behaviors. Female adolescent athletes who are outgoing, get along with others, and are well-liked by teammates are more likely to be chosen as friends, engage in high quality friendships, and be seen as team leaders.

Some studies have examined the effect of peer leaders on individual and team outcomes (Holt, Black, Tamminen, Fox, & Mandigo, 2008; Loughhead & Hardy, 2005; Price & Weiss, 2011, 2013). Price and Weiss (2013) studied the combined influence of peer and coach leadership on female adolescent soccer teams. Effective peer leader behaviors were associated with teammates' perceptions of greater task and social cohesion on their teams, whereas coach behaviors were related to both individual (e.g., perceived competence) and team outcomes (task cohesion, collective efficacy). Peer leaders and coaches engage in different behaviors and thus might fulfill different roles in motivating and inspiring team members to perform, work together, and derive participation benefits. More research is needed to determine the type of peer leadership behaviors that will enhance team members' motivation and performance.

## **Evidence-Based Best Practices for Parents, Coaches, and Program Leaders**

We synthesize research on parent, coach, and peer influence to offer recommendations for enhancing girls' positive psychosocial and behavioral outcomes as a result of participating in sport and physical activity. Further information is available from other reviews (Brustad, 2010; Stuntz & Weiss, 2010; Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009).

### **PARENTS**

- Enable opportunities for your daughters to experience a variety of individual and interdependent sports and physical activities.
- Encourage and support your daughter's interest and participation in sport and physical activity.
- Show confidence in and positively reinforce your daughter's mastery attempts and performance in sport and physical activity.

- Be a positive role model by expressing positive attitudes toward and engaging in regular physical activity.
- Plan family-based physical activities such as walking, bicycling, and rollerblading that demonstrate the value you place on a physically active lifestyle.
- Be involved in your daughter's participation by volunteering to coach her in youth sport or in other roles such as officiating and administration.

### **COACHES**

- Provide frequent instructional feedback to increase girls' physical self-perceptions, enjoyment, motivation, and persistence.
- Positively reinforce girls on behaviors specific to improving and mastering skills.
- Create a mastery motivational climate by emphasizing task-oriented goals and letting girls know that mistakes are part of the learning process.
- Allow opportunities for choice, decision-making, and expression of thoughts and ideas.
- Inspire through transformational leadership—provide optimal challenges, get to know athletes as individuals, and model sportspersonlike and other desirable behaviors.
- Enhance positive teammate interactions and relationships through activities that require group problem-solving and interdependent goals.

### **COMMUNITY PROGRAM LEADERS**

- Train coaches on how to provide developmentally-appropriate feedback and instruction, create a mastery motivational climate, and engage in autonomy-supportive behaviors.
- Encourage coaches, parents, and volunteers to be sources of social support by being active with participants and exuding care and respect for them as individuals.
- Maintain a high-quality program by regularly evaluating whether coaching behaviors are consistent with the mission; use evaluations to make improvements to the program.
- Evaluate impact on girls' psychological development by engaging participants, parents, and coaches in end-of-season surveys on strengths and areas in need of improvement.

## Concluding Remarks

Sport and physical activity participation opportunities and benefits are now ubiquitous for girls just as they have always been for boys. There is much potential for sport and physical activity to contribute positively to girls' psychological development and behavioral outcomes, but these are not automatic consequences of mere participation. Quality of interactions and relationships with parents, coaches, and peers are key to whether positive youth development occurs—through effective feedback, communication styles, social support, and modeling by parents and coaches and through acceptance by teammates, friendship quality, and effective leadership behaviors. Let's ensure that Olympian Alex Morgan's personal experiences of improved confidence, friendships, and life skills through sport participation translate to the millions of girls in the United States and worldwide seeking such opportunities in community and school sports. Parents, coaches, and program leaders must be mindful of conveying positive beliefs and behaving in ways that inspire girls to embrace the value of a physically active lifestyle, emulate desirable participation behaviors, and achieve their potential as a skillful and healthy child, adolescent, and future adult.

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